RASHI

HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK

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A paper, read before the Central Conference of American Rabbis at Cleveland, O., July 5, 1905, in commemoration of the eight hundredth anniversary of Rashi's death

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RASHI, HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK.

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The year 1040 is an important milestone in Jewish history. It marks the close of the Babylonian academies, and is the year in which Rashi was born. Unnoticed and without leaving a void in history the Babylonian Gaonate had passed away. Taking, as it were, official notice of geographical and cultural changes which had occurred in Israel within the last two or three centuries—the Gaonate had really been dead for about a full century before it actually came to an end. Following in the wake of the conquering Islamic-Arabic culture, the Jews had settled in Egypt, North Africa, and Spain in great numbers. At the same time there appeared new Jewish communities and centers of culture in Christian Italy, France, and Germany. Thus the center of gravity for the economic and intellectual life of Jewry had gradually shifted to the West.

The life and intellectual activity of the Jews were conditioned by their relation to the surrounding civilization. In Mohammedan Spain, where from the first the Jews had eagerly accepted the culture of the Arabs together with the Arabic language which they spoke and wrote, they cultivated poetry and philosophy, natural science and philology, and learned to apply to the treatment of their own national literature, not only the positive facts which they had acquired from their Arabic teachers, but also their scientific method and system. In the Christian countries of Northern France, Germany, and Italy, on the other hand, where there were no schools

of superior teachers, but at most the service of narrow-minded priests to attend, the Jews confined themselves exclusively to the study of their own literature, mainly of the Bible and the Talmud.

This limitation, however, was to prove their strength. They were original in their exegesis of Bible and Talmud, for the very reason that they had no models. They approached both of these subjects with impartiality, inasmuch as they were not under the necessity of harmonizing their traditional beliefs with a foreign Arabic-Aristotelian philosophy, as were their Spanish co-religionists. They were free to give their undivided energy and love to the study of Bible and Talmud, while their Spanish brethren were forced to occupy themselves with the formulation of the content of Judaism in bulky codes of law or concise statements of creed, in order to fight the heretical tendencies in their own midst, fostered, as these were, by the surrounding culture which was equal or even superior to their own. Rashi, drawing his nurture from this atmosphere of originality, impartiality, and full devotion which prevailed among the Jews of Northern France, brought these qualities to perfection in his commentaries on Bible and Talmud.

August 1, 1905, marks the eight hundredth anniversary of Rashi's death. With universal love, reverence, and gratitude, the Jews over the entire globe have remembered this teacher by whose writings they are dominated even to-day more than by those of any other mediæval author. In the following brief account of the life and work of Rashi, an attempt has been made to place before the reader the most important facts, critically sifted, as they are at present available.

Legend took hold of the man whose works soon after his death became the property of the entire Jewish people, and created in their imagination a Rashi according to their own ideals and considerably different from the historical Rashi. The people imagined that a man of Rashi's literary importance must have traveled far and wide; must have understood numerous languages and have mastered many branches of knowledge, including, of course, Cabbalah; must have wrought miracles, and must have had his romance. According to

popular imagination, Godfrey, Duke of Bouillon and Lorraine, inquired of Rashi regarding the outcome of the Crusade, and Maimonides (who lived a century later) is said to have met Rashi in Jerusalem. Toward the end of his life Rashi is reported to have traveled to Barcelona, in order to make the acquaintance of his future companion in Paradise. Thus Rashi lived in the hearts of the Jewish people as a legendary prince, until Zunz, in 1822, penetrated the mystery and established the historical Rashi, who, to us moderns, is closer and more intelligible. There was surely no reason for Rashi to fear the light of historical truth; on the contrary, he has gained in importance since Zunz,[1] in 1822, gave us a scientific appreciation of his life and work.

BIOGRAPHY.

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, generally known as Rashi, was born in Troyes, the capital of the old French county of Champagne (now the capital of the Department of the Aube), in the year 1040. The Jewish community of Troyes was small, but very old, and not without importance. The Jews of Troyes were land-owners and vine-cultivators.[2]

Rashi came of a learned family. His father, Rabbi Isaac,[3] and his maternal uncle, Rabbi Simeon ha-Zaken, a disciple of Rabbenu Gershom,[4] were Talmudic scholars. His teacher, Isaac ben Judah, of Mayence, was related to him.[5] We have no knowledge of

[1] "Salomon b. Isaac, genannt Raschi," in "Zeitschrift für die Wiss. des Judenthums," 1822, p. 277 et seq. Hebrew translation with notes by S. Bloch (Lemberg, 1840), under the title, תולדות רבינו שלמה יצחקי. For the sake of brevity, Zunz's work on this subject will be referred to by the name, "Biographie."

[2] Gross, "Gallia Judaica," p. 225.

[3] Rashi on 'Abodah Zarah, 75 a.

[4] Rashi on Sabbat, 85 b.

[5] Goldberg, חפמ טשמונים No. 14; Epstein, "Der Gerschom Meor ha-Golah zugeschriebene Talmud-Commentar," in Steinschneider's "Festschrift," p. 137, note 1.

Rashi's "Lehrjahre" at his home in Troyes. Spurred on by the desire for learning, he went to Worms and Mayence, those ancient seats of Jewish science on the Rhine, where some of his French countrymen were active as teachers. In Worms he studied Bible and Talmud[6] with Jacob ben Jakar, and upon the death of the latter, with his successor, Isaac ha-Levi, whose blind belief in the authority of his teacher was commented upon by his contemporaries.[7] Rashi seems also to have studied various Talmudic tractates with some of his fellow-students, as for instance Solomon ben Simson.[8]

He was soon drawn to the neighboring town of Mayence, which had secured the foremost teachers of France and Germany for its schools. In Mayence there had existed from the tenth century an intellectual activity, such as was to be found in no other city.[9] How greatly must Rashi have been attracted and inspired by this atmosphere!

When he came to Mayence, Rabbenu Gershom, the deeply learned "Light of the Exile," who had exercised so strong an influence upon the practical life of mediæval Jewry, had been dead for half a century.[10] The entire community, however, and especially Gershom's numerous disciples, among whom were Judah ha-Kohen, Eliezer ben Isaac the Great, and many others, still rested under the magic spell of his weighty learning and strong character. It is not to be wondered at, then, that Rashi was influenced by the commentary written by Rabbenu Gershom himself, or by some of his school, more than by any other commentary.

In Mayence, Rashi continued his studies with Isaac ben Judah, who (after the death of Eliezer the Great) had become head of the

[6] Rashi on Pesahim, p. 111 a.

[7] "Pardes," ed. Warsow, 1870, No. 135; Weiss, "Bet Talmud," Vol. II, p. 38.

[8] Epstein, "Schemja, der Schüler u. Sekretär Raschi's," in Frankel's "Monatsschrift," 1897, p. 257.

[9] Epstein, in Steinschneider's "Festschrift," p. 135.

[10] Rabbenu Gershom d. 1028; not 1040, according to the misleading information in "Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah," ed. Venice, p. 429; Gross, l. c., p. 299.

school of Rabbenu Gershom. He also came in contact with Talmudic scholars, such as Meïr ben Abraham ha-Kohen,[11] Nathan and Menahem ben Makir, Samuel and David ben Samuel ha-Levi.[12]

Rashi never studied in Speyer,[13] which we are accustomed to mention in connection with Worms and Mayence, when speaking of the mediæval history of the Jews of the Rhine. The Jewish community of Speyer, as Epstein has proved,[14] was founded not before 1084 by emigrants from Mayence, at a period, therefore, when Rashi's studies and "Wanderjahre" had been completed.

The true Talmud student "eats bread with salt, drinks water by measure, sleeps on the ground, leads a life of hardship and—studies!"—for which regimen the Pirḳe Abot promise him happiness in this world and in the next. Rashi seems often to have lacked the necessary means, in order to live even according to this moderate prescription. He relates himself, in a truly pathetic way, how, as a married student, he suffered for want of clothing and food.[15]

At the end of his student life which, let us hope, was also the end of his hardships, Rashi returned to his birthplace, Troyes, whence he probably never again departed. Here he established the school in which he taught Bible[16] and Talmud.[17] Through his activity Troyes was made the center of Jewish learning in France for more than a century.[18] Besides holding the office of teacher and head of the school, he served as judge and rabbi, probably to the end of his life. We do not know in what manner he earned a livelihood in Troyes. It is not specifically stated in the sources that he received

[11] Epstein, "Jüdische Älterthümer in Speyer," in "Monatsschrift," 1897, p. 38.

[12] Epstein, l. c., p. 136.

[13] I do not know on what authority Bacher bases his contention to the contrary; see his "Raschi und Maimoni" in "Monatsschrift," 1905 (XLIX), p. 3.

[14] Epstein, l. c.

[15] Goldberg, l. c., No. 17, p. 2.

[16] See Epstein, "Schemaja," in "Monatsschrift," 1897, p. 260.

[17] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 324.

[18] Gross, l. c., p. 226.

no compensation for the various offices he held, as in those "ideal times" this was a matter so customary as to evoke no comment.

Rashi, who had married while yet a student, had three daughters, but no son. He was fortunate, however, in having learned sons-in-law, and still more learned grandsons. One daughter, Miriam,[18a] married a pupil of Rashi, Judah ben Nathan, the Tosafist; his second daughter, Jochebed, the learned Meïr ben Samuel of Rameruppt, whose sons were Samuel ben Meïr (RaSHBaM), Isaac ben Meïr (RIBaM), Jacob ben Meïr (Rabbenu Tam), and the exegete and grammarian Solomon ben Meïr,[19] who until recently has been totally eclipsed by his more famous brothers.

The sufferings which the first Crusade, in 1096, brought to the Jews of the Rhine valley, cast a dark shadow upon the soul of Rashi, as may be seen from the tone of his Selihot[20] and from a single allusion in his commentary on Isaiah LIII, 9.[21] In general, however, his life in Troyes seems to have been peaceful and free from trouble, as is evidenced by the uniform thoroughness and clearness of all his works, and still further, by the constant revisions to which he subjected his commentaries. In this respect he may especially be contrasted with his restless Spanish rival, Abraham ibn Ezra.

In his later life he seems to have suffered much from illness.[22] His disciples then acted as his secretaries[23] in order to answer the numerous halakic questions addressed to him from all quarters. In

[18a] See D. Rosin, "R. Samuel ben Meir als Schrifterklärer," Breslau, 1880, p. 3.

[19] Berliner, "Beiträge zur Gesch. der Raschi-Commentare," Berlin, 1901-1902, pp. 16, 46, note 30; "Machsor Vitry" ed. S. Hurwitz, Berlin, 1893, p. 243, No. 275; "Einleitung und Register zu Machsor Vitry," Berlin, 1896-7, p. 60, ad loc. and p. 176, ad loc.; Gross, "Gallia Judaica," p. 162.

[20] Zunz, "Literatur-Geschichte der synagogalen Poesie," p. 252.

[21] Berliner, "Beiträge," p. 53.

[22] Müller, Réponses faites par de célèbres rabbins Français et Lorrains du XIe et XIIe siècle," Vienne, 1881, p. XXVIII, and p. 9.

[23] Müller, ib., No. 15 and the parallel passage in "Pardes," No. 242; for the correct reading of the beginning see Berliner in "Monatsschrift," XXI, p. 288.

the midst of his work,[24] on the 26th of July, 1105 (Tammuz 29, 4865 aera mundi) death overtook him.[25]

THE TALMUD COMMENTARY.

In considering Rashi's works, we begin with the commentary on the Talmud. It is not intended to convey the impression thereby that this is older than his commentary on the Bible. In truth, we know nothing concerning the priority of the one or the other.[26] But with regard to its value and authority, the commentary on the Talmud, in the opinion of both earlier and later scholars, is superior to the one on the Bible. The latter was deemed by the master himself, in his later years, to need a revision in accordance with the progressive, simple methods of Bible interpretation; it no longer satisfied even his own grandson, RaSHBaM [26a]; it excited the derision of Ibn

[24] According to our printed Talmud editions, Rashi's activity was interrupted by death while at work on his commentary on Baba Batra, p. 29 a, and on Makkot, p. 19 b. The latter reference is not historically beyond all doubt. As the Codex de Rossi, No. 1292, has the simple note, עד כאן דברי הרב מכאן ואילך דברי התלמיד. it is possible that the reference to Rashi's death in our editions is merely a note of the printer whose MSS. ended with Makkot, 19 b (Berliner, "Beiträge," p. 16). According to some manuscripts Rashi's death occurred while he was occupied with his commentary on Job, chapter 40. (For fuller references to the various manuscripts see Rosin, l. c., p. 15 et seq.) From all these references we may conclude that Rashi was actually stricken by death while engaged in his usual labors.

[25] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 338.

[26] David of Estella's (c. 1320) note concerning Rashi's works in "Kirjat Sefer" (published in Neubauer's "Medieval Jewish Chronicles," II, p. 231), וחבר [שלמה בר יצחק] פרושים מארבעת סדרי התלמוד הבבלי וחבר גם כן פרוש ישרים וארבעה ספרי המקרא has been mistranslated by Renan, in "Les Écrivains Juifs Français du XIVe Siècle," Paris, 1893, p. 128: "R. Salomon fils d'Isaac (de Troyes) auteur d'un commentaire sur quatre sections du Talmud de Babylone, *travail qui fut suivi* du commentaire sur la Bible." David of Estella makes no assertion concerning the chronological order of the two commentaries.

[26a] Rashbam on Gen., 37, 1.

Ezra[27]; it was often contradicted by Nahmanides[28]; it was not universalistic enough for Isaac Abrabanel,[29] and was not infrequently attacked even by later authors.

On the other hand, the commentary on the Talmud stands unique in all Jewish literature as a work which never met with hostile criticism. It always received unstinted admiration, and found rapid and universal recognition. Darmesteter says:[30] "The commentary on the Talmud became The Commentary *par excellence,* the 'Kontros.'"[31] It was copied by tractates; copies were scattered in France, Italy, Germany, and even in the Orient. Eighty years after Rashi's death, a scribe copied his commentary on the tractate Baba Mezia for the Resh Galuta, David of Mosul. After the invention of printing,[32] it accompanied all editions of the Talmud text, which would be unintelligible without it, and this work, which caused all earlier attempts to be forgotten, could not, in its turn, be superseded by any later commentary."

[27] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 339; Weiss, "Bet Talmud" II, p. 73; comp. also Ibn Ezra's שפה ברורה ed. Fürth, p. 5.

[28] Weiss, l. c.; Abraham Hayyim Viterbo (an Italian Rabbi) in his philosophical treatise "Emunat Ḥakamim" (written in 1695), charges that in his criticism of the Rashi commentary Nahmanides is guilty of blind and fanatic zeal, that Nahmanides, in fact, utterly failed to understand what Rashi had written. The passage reads: אבל הרמב"ן הקשה עליו [על רש"י] ואמר [בראשית א"א] . . . . . ולפי דעתנו לא הבין [הרמב"ן] לא דברי האגדה ולא דברי רבנו שלמה ובהיות רצונו של הרב הנחמני להשיג על דברי רבנו שלמה מחזר תמיד אחר דבריו בלי עיון ובהסח הדעת: see Eliezer Ashkenazi's: "Ṭa'am Zeḳenim," p. 38. Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1854.

[29] Zunz, l. c.

[30] "Reliques Scientifiques," Paris, 1890, p. 169.

[31] From the Latin "Commentarius," l. c.

[32] Rashi's commentary on Berakot was first printed by Joshua Solomon Soncino, December 19, 1483 (Jewish Encycl., Vol. VI, p. 578, s. v. Incunabula). Of this edition but four copies are extant.

The complete Talmud-commentary was first printed by Bomberg, Venice, 1517 et seq. (Zunz, l. c., p. 273.) It is characteristic that the Talmud text is never printed without Rashi's commentary, even in the single-volume edition of Berdychev.

Although it no longer exists in its original completeness, the Rashian commentary covered almost the entire Talmud. For the commentaries on the following tractates have in the course of time been proved to be spurious and falsely ascribed to Rashi: Ta'anit, Mo'ed Katon, Nedarim, Me'ilah and Nazir.[33] The commentary on two tractates was left incomplete, viz.: Baba Batra and Makkot, and was finished by his pupils.

Now, what literature was available to Rashi, while he was at work on his commentaries? The great Zunz has reconstructed for us Rashi's library from his quotations and has shown that it consisted of about eighty works of Mishnic, Talmudic, Geonic, Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-French, and Judeo-German literatures.[34] If to-day, some eighty years after Zunz, we were to make a catalogue of Rashi's library, we should on the basis of Zunz's own later works[35] as well as the works of others have to correct his account in many particulars. We would have to exclude some titles, such as, *e. g.* the "'Aruk" of Nathan ben Jehiel,[36] or the "Targum Jerushalmi,"[37] and would have to add others.

Of most interest to us among the books in this library, however, are the Talmud commentaries which originated in the cities of the Rhine-region about the middle of the tenth century, and were developed from the marginal notes, written in the teacher's copy of the text and the note-books of the students. At that time it is certain there was deposited for general use in the academy (Yeshibah) of

[33] See the references given in Weiss, "Bet Talmud" II, p. 199 et seq. Epstein, in Steinschneider's "Festschrift," p. 116, et seq.; Berliner, "Beiträge," p. 25; Zunz, "Gottesdienstliche Vorträge," Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1892, p. XIV.

[34] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 322.

[35] Zunz himself made corrections of his account of Rashi's library in his "Gottesdienstliche Vorträge," p. XIII.

[36] Completed in 1105, the year of Rashi's death. The erroneous impression that Rashi made use of it, is based upon the fact that both Rashi and Nathan drew their information from the Talmud-Codex of Mayence, of which there will be further mention.

[37] This was unknown to Rashi. Where it occurs, it is either a later interpolation, or a misreading of "Talmud Jerushalmi" (Berliner, "Beiträge," p. 28).

Mayence, a commentary on almost the entire Talmud.[38] This oldest and most important commentary had been universally ascribed to Rabbenu Gershom, until Epstein recently proved that, in its present form, it could not have been written by an individual author, but must have been the work of the disciples of Isaac ben Judah at Mayence.[39]

Be that as it may, it is a significant fact that Rashi not only made most ample use of this commentary, but, at the same time, sought to put himself in possession of all the material to be found in the French and German Talmudic schools, either in written or oral form. It is, nevertheless, the merit of Rashi, to have welded all that material into a new commentary of his own which would not appear other than a distinctly original work, even if more of the sources, used by him, were known to us.

The commentary on the Talmud concerns itself with two main tasks: the emendation of the text and the explanation of words and subjects. The text of the Talmud, unlike that of the Bible, had not been safeguarded against corruption and error by Masoretic tradition. Skilled and unskilled hands had been working on it and correcting it; to such an extent, in fact, that Rabbenu Gershom had tried to put an end to this abuse by writing a model codex of his own[40] and by threatening to excommunicate any one that would make a change in the traditional text. But it was left for Rashi to furnish us with a recension of the Talmud which has not been replaced by a better one even after eight hundred years, and which, owing to the Christian auto-da-fes of the Talmud,[41] it would certainly have been more difficult to construct now.

[38] In the Wilna Talmud edition, 1880-1886, this commentary on the tractates Ta'anit, Baba Batra, Menahot, Bekorot, 'Arakin, Temurah, Keritot, Me'ilah, Tamid, and Hullin is printed under the name of Rabbenu Gershom.

[39] See "Der Gerschom Meor ha-Golah zugeschriebene Talmudcommentar" in Steinschneider's "Festschrift," l. c.

[40] Rabbenu Tam "Sefer ha-Yashar," §620.

[41] In the year 1249 alone twenty-four cartloads of Talmud manuscripts were burned in Paris. Similar holocausts were made in 1553 at Rome, Bologne, and Venice, 1554 at Ancona, and 1559 at Cremona.

Upon the basis of all the accessible manuscripts of the Talmud and of the entire cognate rabbinical literature,[42] and, where manuscripts failed him, by the aid of conjectures,[42a] Rashi's logical mind, opposed to all jugglery, enabled him to select the best readings. These conjectural readings were not inserted in the text, but simply given in his commentary where they are introduced by the uncommonly frequent abbreviation הכי גרסינן=ה"ג. His disciples, however, disregarding the ban of Rabbenu Gershom and the protest of Rabbenu Tam,[43] corrected the copies of the Talmud in accordance with such of Rashi's emendations as seemed in their judgment an improvement upon the accepted text. They certainly earned the gratitude of succeeding generations by their fearless proceeding, thus, as Weiss remarks, sparing us much Pilpul and distortion of the text.

When once the correct reading is established, Rashi proceeds to indicate the source of a quotation or reference in the text. He then explains the connection of the passage with the whole subject-matter and sets forth the trend of the discussion. In the main, however, he concerns himself with verbal explanation and the exposition of the subject-matter,[44] a phase of his work in which he is really at his best. For he possesses a true, intuitive power of penetrating through the lifeless words of the text to the very soul of the author. Equipped with a most thorough knowledge of Talmudic literature as well as with a fine psychological insight, he traces the thought of an ancient Tanna through the most subtle turns and shades of meaning, and follows the reasoning of an Amora and the counter-

[42] See references in Weiss, l. c., p. 130.

[42a] Margolis shows that the emendations of Rashi are frequently conjectural and in the light of closer examination, unnecessary; the Tosafists, indeed, very often repudiate these emendations. The codices which follow Rashi are therefore less valuable than the older ones. Comp. Max L. Margolis, "Commentarius Isaacidis quatenus ad Textum, Talmudis investigandum adhiberi possit, tractatu Erubhin ostenditur." Inaugural Dissertation, 1891.

[43] See my "Jacob ben Meir Tam," in Jewish Encycl., VII, p. 37, and "Sifre" ed. Friedmann, Introduction, chap. 2.

[44] While the commentary of Mayence paraphrases the content and seldom explains details, Rashi directs his attention chiefly to the details. See Weiss, l. c., p. 98; Epstein, l. c., p. 123.

arguments of his opponents in the schoolhouse, until the import of the doubtful utterance is clear to him.

In the clearest and most concise terms he then sets down, what, so to speak, has been inwardly revealed to him. This is the impression one gains while reading the commentary. No foreign thought is interpreted into the text: everything is explained according to principles derived from within.[45] Separated by centuries from the ancient teachers, Rashi is thus able to explain them in the spirit of their own times and of their own world, or, as Weiss tersely says: "Rashi was the Parshan (פרשן), and not the Darshan (דרשן) of the Talmud."[46]

The lexicographical and grammatical[46a] standpoint of Rashi is in general that of Menahem ben Saruḳ and Dunash ibn Labraṭ, that is, the pre-Hayyujian standpoint of the bi-literal root theory. Nevertheless he often maintains his own views against the authority of his predecessors. In the linguistic explanation of words, he "arrived at his conclusions rather by virtue of his skill and experience than by the conscious application of grammatical rules."[47] What he did not find in earlier commentaries, he sought with a sure instinct to reach by comparison of roots and by analogy in the Hebrew and through comparison with the Aramaic. He knew neither Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, nor any other ancient language, and of the modern languages, he understood only French and a little German.

Rashi's general secular knowledge in the provinces of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, history, and archæology, did not exceed that of his contemporaries. But he was a diligent and judicious collector of the best material offered by the traditions of the Babylonian and

[45] Güdemann, "Gesch. des Erziehungswesens u. der Kultur der Juden in Frankreich u. Deutschland," Wien, 1880, p. 41, note 3.

[46] דור דור ודורשיו IV, p. 324.

[46a] See N. Kronberg, "Raschi als Exeget," Breslau, 1882, p. 15 et seq., p. 34 et seq. Profiat Duran in his "Ma'aseh Efod" says with reference to Rashi's grammatical knowledge: ונם בדקדוק הלשון כתב דברים נחמדים See Berliner's "Rashi" (second edition), p. VIII, note 5.

[47] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 285.

Franco-German schools as well as that offered by the constant contact with the life of the cosmopolitan city in which he lived.[47a]

There has been almost no detailed examination of the sources and merits of Rashi's secular learning. Immanuel Löw, however, in his recent paper on the names of plants in Rashi's commentaries on Bible and Talmud,[48] arrives at results, quite flattering to Rashi's knowledge of botany, there being, among 128 botanical names mentioned by the commentator, only 22 errors. It is desirable that similar painstaking investigations be made into the other branches of knowledge of which there are traces in the Rashian commentaries.

It is worth while to say a word now concerning the style of the commentary on the Talmud. If "style is the expression of thought or emotion in written words," as a modern teacher has said, Rashi's admirable style in its clearness and terseness is the expression of his clear, keen, and logical intellect. As an experienced teacher, he anticipates every difficulty that the student may encounter and comes to the aid of the reader with a succinct sentence,—sometimes with a single word. His brevity became proverbial, though not always typical among the Jews. On the other hand, his failure to name the sources, in deference to brevity, must be regarded as a shortcoming of his style.

The Talmud commentary was the result of uninterrupted study lasting for decades. Rashi made it his particular business to revise again and again his explanations of words and emendations of the text;[49] but the changes, which he made, could not at once become known everywhere. For, owing to the rapid popularity which his commentaries on the Talmud earned even during his life-time, there soon came to be various versions. In fact, we are acquainted with no less than three; the first of which was written during his student years at Worms; the second at Mayence; the third which, as a rule,

[47a] Berliner, "Blicke in die Geisteswerkstatt Raschi's," p. 5 et seq. Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1905.

[48] Immanuel Löw, "Pflanzennamen bei Raschi" in Berliner's "Festschrift." Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1903, p. 231.

[49] Which is clearly shown by Isaac C. Moses of Vienna, who made use of a manuscript written by Rashi himself. See "Or Zarua," I, p. 29 b; Epstein, "Schemaja" in Monatsschrift, 1897, p. 258.

is to be found in all printed editions, at Troyes.[50] The fact that there were different versions easily accounts for the variants, or even contradictions, in parallel passages of his commentary, as well as for the differences between quotations in the Tosafot or similar works and in the Rashian text, which we have.

Rashi's Talmudical commentary, helpful as it was in itself, was still more beneficial for the impetus it gave to the rise of the important school of the Tosafists whose work was thereby made possible. The work of the Tosafists, however, though starting from that of Rashi, had a much wider scope. While Rashi was mainly concerned with the simple exposition of the Talmud text and only on rare occasions appended a statement, summing up the Halakah and applying it to modern conditions, the Tosafists made it their principal business, either by direct interpretation or by analogical derivation, to deduce from the Talmud new regulations. These regulations had in view the adjustment of the Talmudic law to the conditions arising from the European environment and from the contact of the French and German Jews with their Christian neighbors. The Tosafists actually made "supplements" (Tosafot), to Talmudic law.

Unobtrusively and without any claim to authority, Rashi and the Tosafists, especially their main representative, Jacob ben Meïr Tam, exerted a deeper and more widespread influence upon succeeding generations than any other authority after the close of the Talmud. They set the standard for the methods of study of the Talmud as well as for religious practice in the entire Jewry of Europe, and they remain the leaders of Talmudic Judaism in these two spheres up to the present day.[51]

THE BIBLE COMMENTARY.

We pass now to a consideration of Rashi's Commentary on the Bible. This commentary, which extends over the whole Bible with the exception of Chronicles,[51a] Ezra-Nehemiah,[51b] and the last part of

[50] Epstein, l. c., p. 258, note 2.
[51] See Güdemann, l. c., p. 44.
[51a] See Rosin, l. c., p. 69.
[51b] See Rosin, l. c., p. 21.

Job, occupies to a certain extent the same relation to his commentary on the Talmud as does the Haggadah to the Halakah. It is less heavy and less serious than the Talmud commentary, and is written in a lighter mood. Rashi, so to say, lets himself go, and this work gives the impression of being the child of his hours of leisure, "the blooming garden," in which he sought refuge from "the dusty quarrels of the Halakah" (Heine, "Hebräische Melodien").

It is interesting to note how Rashi, in accordance with the tendency of his age, seeks to emancipate himself from the older exegesis, still under the sway of the Talmud, and how he strives for the Peshat, *i. e.*, for a sober, natural, and rational interpretation of the Bible. As he tells us at the beginning of the work, by way of preface,[52] his standpoint is entirely that of the Peshat, the Derash being resorted to only when it can be harmonized with the text. It is true that he often breaks this rule, falling unconsciously into the Derash, even where it cannot be reconciled with the plain text. On the other hand, he emphatically repudiates the Midrashic explanation in other innumerable cases, for grammatical or exegetical reasons.[53] It is, however, just this discrimination between the traditional Midrashic interpretations, on the basis of their exegetical value, that makes Rashi the pioneer of the Peshat.[54]

In general, his commentary on the Pentateuch is more Midrashic than that on the other books of the Bible. Similarly, in the Pentateuch the commentary on the legal portions are more Midrashic than the commentary on historical narratives. This is what one would expect from the subject-matter. The Midrashim on the Pentateuch had become almost inseparably connected and intertwined with the text, and, as Rashi unreservedly followed tradition, there was possible in the legal parts of the Pentateuch, no interpretation other than the Midrashic-halakic. On the whole, however, Rashi sought

[52] Genesis, 3, 8, ואני לא באתי אלא לפשוטו של מקרא ולאגדה המישבת דברי המקרא דבר דבור על אופניו: cf. also Rashi on Isaiah, 26, 11 and Ps. 68, 37; Berliner "Beiträge," p. 10.

[53] See references, Weiss, l. c., II, p. 226.

[54] See Bacher, "Die Bibelexegese," in Winter u. Wünsche "Die Jüdische Literatur seit Abschluss des Kanons," Vol. II, p. 276.

to arrive at the meaning of Scripture independently, always guided by the frequently emphasized Talmudic principle that no Bible-verse should be divested of its simple sense.[55]

In his later years Rashi was inclined to revise his commentary in consonance with the advanced rational methods of Bible interpretation, i. e., the Peshat.[56] But it was perhaps just this happy and harmonious blending of Derash and Peshat, satisfying, as it did, the adherents of both tendencies, that won the heart of the Jewish people as no other book has done.

Owing to its popularity, the text of Rashi's commentary was amplified in the sequel by additions and underwent changes at the hands of the foremost among his pupils, such as, *e. g.*, Joseph Ḳara and Shemaiah. Much more, however, has it suffered in points of correctness, clearness, and force through the ignorance of countless copyists and printers.

A. Berliner has made the first attempt at a critical edition of the commentary on the Pentateuch,[57] which has always been the most popular part.[58] This edition, however, although based upon more than one hundred European manuscripts and many rare prints,[59] cannot be considered as final.

In spite of the exceedingly large number of old and good Rashi manuscripts, scattered throughout the libraries of Europe and the Orient,[60] we still possess no critical edition of the complete Bible commentary. Would that some academy or learned society might soon undertake this neglected task!

[55] Bacher, l. c.

[56] See Rashbam on Genesis, 37,1: הי"ה צריך ליעשות פירושים אחרים לפי הפשטות המתחדשים בכל יום.

[57] Raschi, "Der Kommentar des Salomo B. Isak über (sic!) den Pentateuch." Second revised edition Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1905.

[58] Printed by Abraham ben Gershon in Reggio, Calabria, on Adar 10 (February 5), 1475—the first Hebrew book whose date of publication we know with exactness.

[59] Berliner, l. c., p. X, et seq.

[60] The Paris library alone contains no less than twenty-five Rashi-manuscripts to various parts of the Bible; Oxford has thirty-one, Parma alone thirty-eight Pentateuch manuscripts, not to mention smaller libraries which also contain several. See Darmesteter, l. c., p. 173 et seq.

In spite of the absence of a critical edition, "Rashi became and remained throughout all the Middle Ages, the 'Expounder of the Law' (פרשנרתא) κατ' ἐξοχήν. He introduced the lad to the Bible and afforded also to the riper man, even to the scholar, the opportunity for thought and research. One may compare him, if it be permitted, to Terence, who also served as a school book in the Middle Ages, and of whom Grotius, when caught reading him and taken to task for this, said: 'Boys read Terence in one manner, Grotius in another!' So Rashi likewise was a book for young and old. In the fourteenth century, a man was considered to possess but the most elementary education, if his knowledge was confined to Rashi's Bible commentary; while, on the other hand, the most respected and celebrated rabbi would regard it as a compliment, if it was said of him that he was familiar with this commentary." [61]

Moreover, outside of the Jewish pale Rashi received unusual consideration, not only at the hands of the Roman censors who, in the year 1617, struck out whatever did not meet with their approval, but also on the part of Christian exegetes of the Middle Ages and of modern times who made frequent use of his commentaries, sometimes even without giving him credit.[62] As is well known, the Bible translation of Luther is dependent upon Nicholas de Lyra to such an extent that it was remarked by way of jest: "Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset." Now, Nicholas de Lyra followed Rashi so closely that he was called the "Ape of Rashi." [63]

Thus did Rashi's influence continue throughout the ages. Up to this very day the literary activity, which his commentaries have inspired from their first appearance, has stimulated research in Jewish circles, representing the widest divergence in their philosophical and religious views.

While Rashi's importance in the development of rational exegesis, in Bible and Talmud, has received due attention at the hands of

[61] Güdemann, l. c., p. 15.

[62] Zunz, l. c., p. 346 et seq.

[63] Güdemann, l. c., p. 16. As to the dependence of Nicholas de Lyra's commentary on the Psalms upon that of Rashi, see Neumann, "Influence de Rashi et d'autres Commentateurs Juifs sur les Postillae Perpetuae de Nicolas de Lyre," in "Revue des Études Juives," XXVI, p. 172 et seq., XXVII, p. 230.

scholars, little as yet has been done to determine his position in the history of the Hebrew language, or his position in the history of the text of the Talmud. Little also has been done to throw light upon Rashi's general secular knowledge. All of these problems Zunz long ago set for the future investigator.[64]

In the last decades, however, much has been done toward an appreciation of the importance for the history of the French language, of the ancient French glosses in Rashi's commentaries. These glosses amount to 3157, of which 967 refer to the Bible, 2190 to the Talmud.[65] They have not yet been treated exhaustively, although they constitute an important source for the reconstruction of ancient French.[66] The preliminary work[67] in this field has been done by Arsène Darmesteter who, at the expense of the French government, examined, for that purpose, the Rashi manuscripts of England, France, and Italy. Death, however, cut short this scholar's career in his 42d year, and put an end to this work, which was a favorite plan of his conceived by him while yet a Yeshibah-bahur. Thus are the glosses of Rashi still awaiting treatment at the hands of a scholar as competent as Darmesteter.[68]

In the history of Hebrew-French glosses contained in Rabbinic

[64] Zunz, l. c., p. 376.

[65] A. Darmesteter, l. c.

[66] The oldest Rabbinic document for the reconstruction of the French language in the 10th century is the commentary ascribed to Rabbenu Gèrshom, which contains about 120 French glosses. See, concerning it, the scholarly article of L. Brandin in "Revue des Études Juives," XLII, p. 48 et seq., XLIII, p. 72 et seq. Concerning the 15 French glosses in the Bible commentary of Menahem b. Helbo, who preceded Rashi, see S. Poznansky. פתרוני רבי מנחם בר חלבו in N. Sokolow's "Sefer ha-Yobel," Warsaw, 1904.

[67] Collected and published by his brother, James Darmesteter, in "Reliques Scientifiques," Vol. I, part 2 (Études Judeo-Français). The older literature on the glosses is given there. See also G. Schlessinger, "Die altfranzösischen Wörter im Machsor Vitry." Mayence, 1899, p. 9 et seq.

[68] A. Berliner recently published "Die alt-französischen Ausdrücke im Pentateuch-Commentar Raschis," Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1905, under the Hebrew title, קונטרס הבלעזין as "Sonderabdruck aus der zweiten Auflage der Raschi-edition des Verfassers." The pamphlet is not meant to be a scientific study, but is intended simply for a practical purpose (page 7).

literature down to the fifteenth century, Rashi's influence is clearly perceptible; for all Hebrew-French glossaries, as far as known to us, draw their material principally from him.[69] A recently published Hebrew-French glossary of the thirteenth century[70] contains numerous evidences of the influence Rashi must have exerted.

OTHER WRITINGS.

Rashi wrote a commentary on Genesis rabbah which apparently has been lost; for the commentary first published under his name by Abraham ben Gedaliah ibn Asher of Venice (1562), is plainly not genuine.[71] This commentary represents an unskillful compilation from several commentaries, one of which, beginning with the section "Weeleh Toledot" (Genesis XXV, 19), is perhaps based upon a fragment of the original Rashi commentary.[72] There has also been ascribed to Rashi by its first publisher a commentary on the "Pirke Abot" (Mantua, 1540)—a commentary which Jacob Emden already declared to be spurious.[73]

The Siddur, said to have been written by Rashi, and extant in three incomplete manuscripts, has recently been subjected to a critical analysis[74] and is being prepared for publication at the hands of Salomon Buber of Lemberg, who, in spite of his old age, has undertaken the publication of all hitherto unpublished works, ascribed to Rashi. Of the seven Selihot composed by Rashi, the dominant note of which is deep sorrow, only two have found a place in our liturgy.[75]

[69] Brandin, "Les Glosses Françaises de Gerschom de Metz," in "Revue des Études Juives," XLII, l. c.

[70] Mayer Lambert et Louis Brandin, "Glossaire Hébreu-Français du XIIIe Siècle," Paris, 1905.

[71] To which Weiss, l. c., p. 262, and O. H. Schorr, in "He-Haluz" X, have already called attention.

[72] A. Epstein, "Der sogenannte Raschi-Commentar zu Bereschit-Rabba," in Berliner's "Magazin für die Wiss. des Judenthums," 1887, p. 1 et seq.

[73] See his "Ez-Abot," (Commentary on "Pirke Abot"), Weiss, l. c., p. 262.

[74] Buber, "Sefer ha-Orah." Introduction, p. 60 et seq.; comp. also, Zunz, l. c., p. 374; idem, "Die Ritus," p. 25; David Kaufmann in "Bet Talmud," II, p. 295; Halberstamm, ib., p. 296.

[75] Zunz, "Literatur-Geschichte," p. 252.

"In treating of Rashi as a teacher and commentator, we must not forget his activity as a Dayyan and Rabbi." In his Siddur and in his "Sefer Issur we-Hetter";[75a] likewise in various later halakic writings, such as the "Mahzor Vitry"[76] by Rashi's pupil Simhah of Vitry, the "Sefer ha-Pardes"[77] and "Sefer ha-Orah"[78] (both of which in their accepted form were erroneously ascribed to Rashi himself), the "Shibbale ha-Leket" and other similar works, as well as in collections of Gaonic responsa,[79] are imbedded Rashi's short ritualistic treatises[79a] and numerous responsa.

Even as a student Rashi was successful in controverting many a decision of his teachers,[80] and was once selected by them as a judge in a case brought for decision.[81] A number of Rashi's regulations have remained in force down to our day, *e. g.* his decision concerning the position of the Mezuzah[82] and his arrangement of the portions from the Torah in the phylacteries;[83] hence we speak of "Rashi's Tefillin" as distinguished from "Rabbenu Tam's Tephillin." Among his contemporaries Rashi stood high as an authority in halakic matters, as is proved by the numerous inquiries which came to him on many occasions from France and Germany. His time and energy being occupied with his commentaries, however, he often referred such

[75a] Not the printed work of Isaac ben Meir of Düren (1320-1330), but a work in manuscript, ascribed to Rashi, see Buber, l. c., p. 40 et seq.

[76] See the references in Hurwitz, "Einleitung u. Register zum Machzor Vitry," Berlin, 1896-97, p. 58.

[77] Ed. pr. Constantinople, 1807, second edition Warsaw, 1870; see Buber, l. c., p. 88.

[78] Recently published by S. Buber, Lemberg, 1905, with a very valuable introduction. Concerning the authorship of this work, see Epstein, l. c., p. 296 et seq., and Buber, l. c., p. 28.

[79] For fuller references see Buber, l. c., p. 153, and Müller, l. c., p. XXV et seq.

[79a] See Epstein, in "Monatsschrift," 1897, p. 258 et seq.

[80] *E. g.* Isaac ha-Levi, "Pardes," No. 242; Müller, l. c., No. 11; Epstein, l. c., p. 258.

[81] See Goldberg, l. c., No. 12.

[82] Zunz, "Biographie," p. 331, note 64.

[83] Menahot, 34 b. Raschi s. v. כיצד סדרן; Tosafot, ibid., s. v. והקורא; "Or Zarua," Vol. I, p. 558; "Sefer ha-Terummah," Hilkot Tefillin, No. 206; "Machzor Vitry," No. 512, p. 260.

questions to his disciples, to be answered according to his instructions, his relative Shemaiah [84] very often acting as secretary.

Rashi's decisions, however, had already lost their authoritative force in the following generation. His own grandson, Jacob ben Meïr, frequently contradicted him. Rashi was a scholar far too contemplative and introspective to exercise a strong influence upon the Halakah of daily life. He was, moreover, too careful and conscientious to commit himself in haste to decisions [85] of practical consequence. In fact, once, when yielding to an importunate request, he begged his disciples to keep the decision secret.[86] From this it will be intelligible why, in his Talmud commentary, he gives so few Piṣke Halakah (legal decisions,—a fact, already noticed by Ḥayyim david Azulai.[87]

This reluctance to regulate the practical religious life of his contemporaries is plainly in keeping with his warm and unreserved advocacy of the Minhag. The Minhag, Rashi held, is itself a law,[88] which is based upon good reasons,[89] and a departure from which during the galut [90] would endanger the peace of the congregations of Israel.[91]

CHARACTERIZATION.

A few more words will, I hope, complete the sketch of Rashi's character, of which some traits have been mentioned in the previous pages and particularly in the last paragraph. Of a mild and loving

[84] Concerning him see Epstein, l. c., p. 260.

[85] See "Pardes," No. 84, at the end, and No. 129; "Machzor Vitry," No. 43, p. 268; Berliner, "Zur Charakteristik Raschis," in Kaufmann's "Gedenkbuch," Breslau, 1900, p. 267 et seq.

[86] Mordechai on Baba Meẓia, §338; Rashi on Ḥullin, 12 a; Berliner, l. c., p. 269 et seq.

[87] Müller (l. c., p. XXVI) is of the opinion that Rashi gives the Pesak only on such subjects which he has already treated at length elsewhere, as in a Responsum, while Weiss (l. c., p. 136), holds that he gives a decision only in cases concerning which there was difference of opinion among his contemporaries.

[88] "Pardes," §174.

[89] Ibid., §57, at the end.

[90] Ibid., §1, at the end.

[91] Ibid., §175, at the end.

nature, Rashi was charitable enough to ascribe to the deeds of his fellowmen noble rather than low motives. As he admonished his co-religionists to love peace and harmony, by which alone they could withstand the persecutions of their time,[92] so he urged, like his predecessor Rabbenu Gershom, a mild treatment of those who had embraced Christianity under the pressure of circumstances.[93] He was even inclined to regard these meshummadim as full Jews in matters religious, and censured those who recalled the apostacy of such as had returned to Judaism.[94]

Rashi was a man of great kindliness and over-flowing cordiality. How warm and loving was it of the great teacher to call his pupils brothers and friends![95] With this mildness and affectionate nature there went a natural and genuine modesty, which was deepened and ennobled by a recognition of the fragmentary character of all human knowledge. In every responsum, although directed to the most insignificant inquirer, we find this simple modesty.[96] While profoundly reverential to his teachers and masters, Rashi was nevertheless independent in his judgment and by no means timid, when to his mind, the view of an older man had to be set aside. His literary honesty is a model for all times. He gladly accepted instruction from others,[97] as he willingly admitted his own errors, often correcting former explanations and even halakic decisions.[98] Whoever has even a slight acquaintance with Rashi's commentaries, knows how ready Rashi is, when necessary, to make an admission of ignorance.

The few facts we possess regarding Rashi's life as well as Rashi's

[92] See "Ozar Nehmad," Vol. II, p. 175.

[93] See Berliner, l. c., p. 271 et seq.

[94] "Ozar Nehmad," l. c.; Mordechai, l. c., § 321.

[95] Berliner, l. c., p. 266.

[96] Characteristic in this respect is the answer he gave to the Jewish community of Cavaillon which had requested him to abrogate a ban pronounced by Rabbenu Gershom. Said Rashi: "In regard to your plea to remove this ban, may it be far from me to assume the authority of a competent Bet Din. Were I in your midst, I would join you and abrogate the ban; but who am I that I should assume authority in other communities, for I am poor and insignificant, and am as weak as an orphan." ("Ozar Nehmad," l. c., p. 178.)

[97] "Or Zarua," II, 315.

[98] "Pardes," §139.

writings, point to the purity of his character, the unselfishness of his aims through life, the uncompromising sincerity and modest simplicity of his nature. When he passed away, the seed sown so generously by his overpowering personality, had already come to thousand-fold fruitage, and throughout the ages his soul and his works continued to inspire and to stimulate. Even to-day, separated as we are from the great teacher by a period of eight centuries, no matter whether we regard him in the light of legend or in the truthful mirror of history, we readily assent to the estimate of the German halakist Eliezer ben Nathan,[99] pronounced a generation after Rashi's death:

מימיו אנו שותים ומפיו אנו חיין אשר אזן וחקר ותקן אונים לתורה, שפתותיו שמרו דעת, תורה נתבקשה ונתחדשה ונדרשה מפיו, תורת אמת היתה בפיהו בשלום ובמישור הלך והעמיד לעולם רגל שלישי והגדיל תורה והאדיר:

"Of his waters we drink and by his words we live; he searched out, examined, and disclosed the meaning of the Torah; his lips kept knowledge and the Law was sought at his mouth; even as it was rejuvenated by him; the law of truth was in his mouth; he walked in peace and uprightness; he placed the Law upon a firm foundation and made it great and glorious."

From the historical perspective of our own day we may say that Rashi represents the purest and noblest type of mediæval Talmudic Judaism, a living witness of the fact that from the soil of Talmudic culture, without the adventitious aid of foreign influence, there could arise a great and, in the truest sense, harmonious character. Of those who in the Middle Ages, sought to fuse Jewish and non-Jewish thought, Maimonides admittedly ranks highest both in equipment and achievement. Compared with him, Rashi appears one-sided, deficient in the sciences and philosophies, and limited in his outlook. In originality and epoch-making characteristics, however, Rashi excels. Rashi was no systematic genius, no *philosopher;* but he was more than that. In our own opinion the absolutely harmonious and unequivocally true personality of Rashi is infinitely more genuine and more truly Jewish.

[99] Weiss, l. c., p. 73.